



NEWS

from the National Wildlife Refuge System

Upper Mississippi River *National Wildlife Refuge Complex* **Comprehensive Conservation Plan Update** *August 2002*

U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

Upper Mississippi River *National Wildlife Refuge Complex*

Comprehensive Conservation Plan Update *August 2002*



Inside This Issue

Comprehensive Conservation Planning Begins	2
Who We Are and What We Do	4
You Are Invited	6
Broad Range of Issues to be Addressed in the CCP	6

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Comprehensive Conservation Planning Begins for Upper Mississippi River National Wildlife Refuges

Managing a national wildlife refuge is complicated business; what one species thrives on may be less beneficial for another species. For example, should a refuge restore oak savanna habitat to benefit grassland birds at the expense of forest-associated species? Given limited funding, should staff focus on inventorying wildlife populations or combat invasive species? A new trail will enhance access for fishing, but will it make an area less desirable for nesting birds?

Answering these and other questions is what will shape the future of a national wildlife refuge. In comprehensive conservation planning, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) asks staff as well as a wide range of people, agencies and organizations what they see as the primary issues facing the refuge, and asks how those issues should be resolved. Ultimately, comprehensive conservation planning charts a course that best addresses the issues, fulfills the mission of the National Wildlife Refuge System, and fulfills the mission and purpose of the refuge.

Planning has always occurred on refuges, but in 1997 the National Wildlife Refuge Improvement Act directed the Service to prepare comprehensive conservation plans for every refuge within the Refuge System. The Service has since established planning policy that outlines a collaborative and methodical approach involving communities, neighbors, state wildlife agencies, agricultural agencies, conservation organizations and many others.

The Service is just beginning work on comprehensive conservation plans, or CCPs, for three national wildlife refuges within the Upper Mississippi River National Wildlife Refuge Complex: the



Upper Mississippi River National Wildlife and Fish Refuge (Upper Miss Refuge); the Trempealeau National Wildlife Refuge (NWR); Driftless Area NWR; and the proposed Lost Mound National Wildlife Refuge. This newsletter is intended to define comprehensive conservation planning, describe how it might affect you, and relate upcoming opportunities to participate in the planning process.

What is a CCP?

A CCP is a 15-year plan that identifies issues, goals, objectives and strategies for refuge management. Like Master Plans of the 1980s, the CCP provides refuge managers with a blue print for management, and it provides neighbors and others a clear picture of what the Service intends to do in terms of managing habitat, protecting wildlife, and providing a place where people can enjoy wildlife-dependent activities.

Along with the CCP, the Service completes environmental documentation, either an environmental assessment (EA) or an environmental impact statement (EIS) – that evaluates the impact of the management direction proposed in the CCP. We will be preparing an EIS as part of this planning process.

Why Does the Service Prepare CCPs?

Refuges gain a lot through the comprehensive conservation planning process. The opportunity to visit with a wide range of people, local government units and agencies is perhaps one of the most beneficial aspects of planning. We hope that we strengthen the partnerships we have today and that we forge new ones as the planning process develops.

The results of a planning process are important too. Long-term plans establish consistent management direction and they provide managers and staff with not only a vision for the refuge, but a clear road to reaching that vision. Establishing a clear direction helps identify funding priorities.

September 11, 2002

This open house will be held in Elkader, Iowa, and will cover only the Driftless Area NWR. The open house will run from 5 p.m. to 9 p.m. at the Central State Bank Building, which is located at 102 North Main in Elkader.

September 12, 2002

An open house will begin at 4 p.m. at the Prairie du Chien Senior High School in Prairie du Chien, Wisconsin. A public comment session will begin at 7 p.m. The High School is located at 800 East Crawford.

Upper Miss Refuge, La Crosse District (Pools 7 and 8)

September 17, 2002

An open house will begin at 4 p.m. at the Stoddard Village Hall in Stoddard, Wisconsin. A public comment session will begin at 7 p.m. The Village Hall is located at 180 North Main Street.

September 18, 2002

The open house will begin at 4 p.m. at the Brownsville Community Center, located at Sixth and Main Street in Brownsville, Minnesota. The public comment session will begin at 7 p.m.

September 19, 2002

The open house begins at 4 p.m. at the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service Resource Center, 555 Lester Avenue in Onalaska, Wisconsin. The public comment session begins at 7 p.m.

Upper Miss Refuge, Winona District (Pools 4, 5, 5A, and 6) and Trempealeau NWR

September 24, 2002

The open house begins at 4 p.m. at the Wabasha-Kellogg High School in Wabasha, Minnesota. An



open public comment session begins at 7 p.m. The High School is located at 2113 East Hiawatha Drive.

September 25, 2002

An open house begins at 4 p.m. in the Auditorium of Minnesota State College, located at 1250 Homer Road in Winona, Minnesota. The open public comment session begins at 7 p.m.

September 26, 2002

This open house will focus on the Trempealeau NWR only. The open house begins at 4 p.m. at Trempealeau Town Hall, located at Highway 35/54 in Centerville, Wisconsin. The open public comment session will begin at 7 p.m.

Please Take Me Off the Mailing List!

We will be mailing periodic updates on the CCP process, and we want to ensure that our mailing list includes only people who want to receive information. If you do not want to continue receiving updates on this planning project, please fill in your name and address on the coupon below and mail it back to us at U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, Upper Mississippi River National Wildlife and Fish Refuge, Attention CCP; 51 East 4th Street, Room 101, Winona, MN 55987.

Please remove my name from the mailing list for the Upper Mississippi River National Wildlife Refuge Complex CCP! (Please Print)

Name:

Address:

6

You Are Invited

CCP will address broad range of refuge issues and opportunities

Open houses will provide many opportunities for people interested in the future of the Refuge Complex to identify issues and opportunities that should be considered in comprehensive conservation planning. Here are some of the issues that have already been noted:

<ul style="list-style-type: none">■ Recreational navigation in designated closed-areas.■ The managed hunt at Potter’s Marsh on the Savanna District■ Camping on beaches and along the channel: crowds, trash, conflicts; also solitude, quality family outings, good fun.■ Continue Managed Duck Hunts?■ How to slow the loss of Island Habitat?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">■ Sediments and Nutrients Enter the River from Tributaries■ Invasive species such as zebra mussels, Asian carp, purple loosestrife endan-ger fish, wildlife and mussels.■ Human disturbance Affects Wildlife■ Trapping success of muskrats and other furbearers affected by habitat changes■ Protect Archeological sites on the river■ Refuge Volunteers Help Make the Refuge Click■ How to mesh natural resourece management and commercial naviagation on the River?■ How to provide opportuni-ties to observe wildlife?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">■ Urban encroachment on the Refuge.■ Temporary reduction in water levels improve habitat.■ “Leave No Trace” when using the river.■ Visitor contact stations will increase public awareness of the refuge.■ Friends of the Refuge help fish and wildlife■ How can the refuge help in fish management on the river?■ User groups (hunt, fish, bird watchers, boaters, etc.) have different needs■ Hunting, fishing and trapping regulations vary by state along the refuge; consistency is needed.■ The refuge needs to upgrade some of its facilities.
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You Are Invited

Scoping meetings will begin in late August on the southern end of the Refuge Complex. The dates and locations are as follows:

Upper Mississippi River Refuge, Savanna District (Pools 12, 13 and 14); Lost Mound NWR (Proposed)

August 27, 2002
An open house will begin at 3 p.m. at the Clinton Community College, Graphic Arts Technology Center, Room 10. An open public comment session will begin at 7 p.m. The College is located at 1951 Manufacturing Drive in Clinton, Iowa. Open house presentations will begin hourly at 3 p.m., 4 p.m., 5 p.m. and 6 p.m.

August 28, 2002
The open house begins at 3 p.m. at the Savanna District Office, Ingersoll Wetlands Learning Center. Presentations will begin at 3 p.m., 4 p.m., 5 p.m. and 6 p.m., and an open public comment session will begin at 7 p.m. The Ingersoll Wetlands Learning Center is located at 7071 Riverview Road in Thomson, Illinois.

August 29, 2002
This open house is intended to focus on the Upper Mississippi National Wildlife and Fish Refuge and the Driftless Area National Wildlife Refuge. The open house begins at 3 p.m. at the Holiday Inn Dubuque Five Flags. Presentations begin at 3 p.m., 4 p.m., 5 p.m. and 6 p.m., and a public com-ment session will begin at 7 p.m. The session for the Driftless Area NWR will be held in the Clarion Room and the Upper Miss Refuge session will be held in the Dubuque Room.

Upper Miss Refuge, McGregor District (Pools 9, 10 and 11) and Driftless Area NWR

September 10, 2002
The open house will begin at 4 p.m. at the Lansing Middle School in Lansing, Iowa. A public comment session begins at 7 p.m. The Middle School is located at 696 Main Street.

Comprehensive Conservation Planning Begins

3



one alternative they believe best fulfills the refuge’s purpose and mission. This becomes the “preferred alternative” in the environmental documentation.

A draft CCP is then prepared that identifies management goals. For each goal, the CCP identifies objectives that will be used to achieve the goal and specific strategies for accomplishing the objectives. The draft CCP and environmental documentation are distributed to the public, other federal, state and local agencies, and are made available on the Internet. Everyone is invited to comment.

After the comment period ends, Refuge staff and planners revise the CCP and the environmental documentation based on the comments received. The document is completed when the Regional Director signs it.

Of course, things can change dramatically over the course of 15 years, especially when there is a river to consider. The CCP will be reviewed periodically and updated if circumstances warrant it.

What Does Refuge Planning Mean to Me?

Comprehensive conservation planning is a way for you to be involved in the future of the refuge. Whether you hunt, hike, farm or live next door, this planning project will mean different things to different people. The Refuge Complex wants to hear from everyone with an interest in the future of the Upper Miss Refuge, Trempealeau NWR, or Driftless Area NWR. This is a chance to voice your ideas and concerns.

How Can the Public Participate?

The very first step in planning is to ask people what issues they think refuge management should address in the next 15 years. In addition to the initial scoping meetings, we also anticipate hosting focus meetings on particular subjects as well as workshops in which key elements of the CCP will be developed. Once a draft plan is completed, paper copies will be available and the document will also be available on the Internet. Typically, the comment period on the draft plan is open for 60 days.

Another very good reason for preparing a CCP is that Congress directed the Service to do so in the Refuge Improvement Act of 1997.

How Does the Service Prepare a CCP?

Developing a long-term plan is slow work. It begins with preplanning, when Refuge Managers, planners and staff begin compiling the biological, operational, and visitor services data that will be the backbone of the CCP.

The planning process is launched when Managers and planners begin meeting with the public to find out what issues people think should be addressed in planning. This step, which is referred to as “scoping,” will begin for the Upper Mississippi Refuge Complex in August. (The dates and locations of scoping meetings for this project are listed beginning on page 5.) While scoping gener-ally begins with a series of open-house-style meetings in which people offer ideas and opinions, opportunity for public comment continues through the entire planning process.

After the initial scoping meetings, managers, staff and planners assemble a list of issues that will need to be addressed in the CCP. A variety of management alternatives are developed that are tailored to the identified issues. For example, alternatives might include a current management alternative that would allow readers to compare what actually is happening on the refuge with what is proposed. Another alternative might propose expanded public use; another might emphasize managing for a particular habitat, and another might propose managing for still another kind of habitat. The alternatives are evaluated and the refuge manager, staff and planners identify

Public comment on both the process and the plan are welcome throughout the planning project. You can comment online (<http://midwest.fws.gov/planning/uppermissstop.htm>); or by writing to the Refuge Complex at U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service; Upper Mississippi River National Wildlife and Fish Refuge; Attention: CCP Comment; 51 East 4th Street, Room 101; Winona, MN 55987. You can also call the Refuge Complex at 1-888-291-5719 and through the Federal Information Relay Service at 1-800-877-8339.

The CCP Schedule

Given the extent of public involvement and document review the CCP process entails, we anticipate that it will take 3 years to complete the Refuge Complex CCP. A variety of factors influence time frames, so the following outline may not hold true. We will provide periodic updates throughout the planning process.

Scoping – Spring 2002 through Fall 2002
 Develop Management Alternatives – Winter 2002 through Spring 2003
 Prepare Draft CCP – Fall 2003 through Spring 2004
 Release Draft CCP – Spring 2004
 Prepare Final CCP – Summer 2004 to Fall 2004
 Release Final CCP – Fall 2004

Who We Are and What We Do

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is the primary federal agency responsible for conserving, protecting, and enhancing fish and wildlife and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people. Specific responsibilities include enforcing federal wildlife laws, managing migratory bird populations, restoring nationally significant fisheries, administering the Endangered Species Act, and restoring wildlife habitat such as wetlands.

The Service's role also includes managing the National Wildlife Refuge System, the world's largest collection of lands specifically managed for fish and wildlife. The System is a network of more than 530 national wildlife refuges encompassing



more than 93 million acres of public land and water. The majority of these lands – 82 percent – are in Alaska, with approximately 16 million acres spread across the remaining states and several island territories. National wildlife refuges provide habitat for more than 5,000 species of birds, mammals, fish and insects.

Refuges are also unique places for people. When it is compatible with wildlife and habitat needs and the purpose for which the refuge or district was established, they can be used for wildlife-dependent activities such as hunting, fishing, wildlife observation, photography, environmental education and environmental interpretation.

The Upper Mississippi River National Wildlife Refuge Complex

The Upper Mississippi River National Wildlife Refuge Complex is comprised of three refuges: the Upper Mississippi River National Wildlife and Fish Refuge; Trempealeau National Wildlife Refuge; Driftless Area National Wildlife Refuge; and the proposed Lost Mound National Wildlife Refuge. Each refuge is described briefly in the following paragraphs.

Upper Mississippi River National Wildlife and Fish Refuge

The “Upper Miss” Refuge winds through 260 miles of beautiful bluff country. Its marshes, wooded islands, bottomland forests and upland prairies provide the diverse habitats necessary for fish and wildlife species. Established in 1924, this was the first refuge designated for both wildlife and fish. Today, more than 233,000 acres of wooded islands, marshes and backwaters comprise

Upper Mississippi River National Wildlife Refuge Complex



the Upper Miss Refuge. The Refuge is divided into districts, including the Winona District (Pools 4-6) in Minnesota; the La Crosse District (Pools 7-8) in Wisconsin; the McGregor District (Pools 9-11) in Iowa and Wisconsin; and the Savanna District (Pools 12-14) in Illinois.

Trempealeau National Wildlife Refuge

Established in 1936, Trempealeau National Wildlife Refuge includes 6,226 acres. The Refuge's rolling prairies, rich wetlands and bottomland forests support a variety of wildlife species. The Refuge is an isolated backwater, cut off from the Mississippi River and the Trempealeau River by dikes, providing needed resting and feeding areas for waterfowl and other birds.

Driftless Area National Wildlife Refuge

The Driftless Area National Wildlife Refuge consists of small, scattered and very unique tracts of land in northeastern Iowa. Most of the Refuge is algific talus slopes, which are characterized by an outflow of cold air and water from bedrock and which create cool and moist conditions that are unique to the slopes. The endangered Iowa Pleistocene snail and the threatened Northern monkshood are two species that depend on this rare habitat. The Refuge is managed through the McGregor District of the Upper Mississippi River National Wildlife and Fish Refuge.

Lost Mound National Wildlife Refuge (Proposed)

The proposed Lost Mound National Wildlife Refuge consists of 9,404 acres and is the former site of the Savanna Army Depot. It includes 5,000+ acres of a diverse wetland complex (containing bottomland forest, flowing side channels and backwater lakes) and 4,000+ acres of remnant sand prairie/savanna. The area provides habitat for 47 species on the Federal or State endangered and threatened species list.